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THE SCOPE OF MOTHERHOOD.

BY LADY HAMILTON.

THIS subject is full of special interest to the actual mother, likewise the potential mother, and it is because of its application to a very wide area of women that I have chosen it for to-day's talk.

You must be patient with my methods, please, of handling my subject. For I tell you that I am apt to digress from the steady common-place attitude of mind and perhaps imagine far too much, and express far too much on the sentimental side of things. But Life, and Life's ways, get so dull when dealt with only as they are, and not as they *might* be, and as they *should* be! The Soul is always asking for some prospect, some hope, something to work up to, isn't it?

This question of Motherhood, then, has two outlooks, the real and the ideal, the actual and the potential.

The very word Motherhood has a lovely sound. Insensibly we picture at once a condition of love, production, protection, an enfolding safety and shelter of some sort—possibly a divine condition of repose and peace or it may be a dignified condition of earnest activity. There is a full tone about the word, and a consoling sweet sound which appears to rest the mind even to contemplate. But the main thought of Motherhood is a loving sympathy, and a soft shelter from all that irks and frets us in the contact with the world,—and above all it speaks of goodness. That sort of goodness that works with untiring love for the household, that prays with untiring lips the prayer for its safety, that leads with patient, tender hand, the straying, wilful feet of its children.

Motherhood is a tolerably expansive idea, and is suggestive of an almost limitless horizon of possibilities. I go so far as to think that every woman-child should be educated for Motherhood from the cradle, and that the sanctity of her potential Motherhood should be considered long, long before she marries or thinks of marriage, or even when marriage

will never be her real vocation. It has been said, by whom I wish I knew, that "she who rocks the cradle rules the world," and if we think deep into that idea we find it practically is so. She is the vehicle of production, she it is who peoples the lands; she is the educator and teacher of the infant mind, she it is who guides the early years of the future men and women. She is herself a power perhaps to-day, and to-morrow, though beneath the green sod, her influence remains on the generation she leaves behind, and so "her works," as it were, "do follow her."

The condition of Motherhood is the most dignified and the most beautiful of all positions in life, and every picture painted of the Madonna has tried to express in the figures of the Mother and Child, some thought of victory, gladness, humility, and hope. The Madonna and Child are after all only a type of the beauty and grace, and of the infinite comfort, that the sight of a mother and little child always have for the human-loving public.

"Mother" is mainly the "Good Fairy" of our home life, and in the homes of England so much of her success as a nation has been born. I look upon the homes of England as the foundation of her Empire, and it seems to me that in them are nourished and cherished the workers for, and rulers of, this great country. The grit and the purpose of men are home bred, and the graces of life are home bred, and Motherhood must indirectly bear the blame or praise of the nation's honour or degradation, its rise or its fall in dignity. In Motherhood I feel I must include all women, for it is they who, married or unmarried, as wife, widow or maid, are mostly responsible for the making of the men, and the men along with the women mean the Nation.

Do you remember the lines in *Aurora Leigh* after she has written her great poem and has refused her cousin's love, she reflects?

"I might have been a common woman now,
Less alone, and less left alone,
With chubby children hanging round my neck
To keep me low and wise.
Ah me, the vine that bears such fruit is proud to stoop with it.
The palm stands upright in a realm of sand."

But no palm need stand upright in a realm of sand really.
The Motherhood in all of us can be gratified to some extent,

though the babes we cherish may not be the children of our lovers. They are, perhaps, the motherless and fatherless bairns of this world, the sad, the sick, and the sordid, whose motherless condition moves the heart of the great Mothering bands of dear, benevolently souled women to shelter and care for them, and to so extend their power of mothering and Motherhood that the wilderness does through their influence blossom as the rose. And here comes in a great item of encouragement for us all. No love is ever lost, no good deed that does not somewhere find its mark, no tender word spoken that does not reach some sorrow-laden soul and cheer it. "Cast thy bread upon the waters," and possibly we may know whom it has fed after many days, though perhaps never! that is little to the point, Motherhood means giving, it means tending, it means expending all, only out of pure, sweet love. And to know that it may be softening and sweetening life's sorrowful hard ways to some weary feet, and to some sour cups it may be sweetening the draughts, is good enough for the simple Motherhood's desire to give, and not receive comfort.

So far you will say we have only dealt with the ideal, scarcely touching on the practical and real actual every-day work. Well, we will turn to it. Motherhood implies that the mother has some knowledge of herself, her disposition, her character, her virtues and her faults; that she also is well acquainted with her constitution and her condition of bodily health.

Maternity of the physical, actual kind may be her lot, or she may only stand in some sort of motherly relation to some of her kindred, or even to aliens. "Know thyself," said the Delphic Oracle, and self-knowledge of our physical, mental and moral construction, healthily and normally grasped, will save the actual mother who bears children from many an after regret that she might have brought them into the world better equipped for its struggle, had she known. And later as the children grow up, she might have lost her temper less often, and managed them better, had she thought of where they were repeating her faults, and where her virtues, and where their father's kind was being reproduced.

Very diligent painstaking is required of Motherhood in these matters where it concerns her own reproduction, and

where it is the upbringing and mothering of other folks' bairns; the strain they come from, and the general surroundings and circumstances of their lives, have equally to be considered. In educating our children (and we can't throw all the responsibility on the school and the teachers) the greatest lesson of all is goodness, the next is reverence, and the next observation, and comparison. The critical faculty is by no means to be crushed out of a child, but we have to guide it and help it aright. Let the children discuss their opinions with you, and come to own their decisions. Of course it is very difficult to put into them that ever graceful charm of charity while they are yet young, but time will bring it. Unfortunately more evil is wrought by the sitters who endeavour to balance themselves on both sides of the hedge, than by the decided though possibly mistaken position of definite criticism. Children are usually copyists, and they are often absorbing to themselves the attitudes of their elders, and occasionally deciding firmly that when as old as you "they won't be like you" nor "do what you do." Sometimes mother's conduct is the divine torch that we look to light us home, alas! sometimes it is the blazing beacon that reveals the pit-falls and vanities which we desire to avoid.

It is essential to the child's progress in education that parents should work with, and not against the teachers. Boys are apt to consider the schoolmaster as a lawful enemy brought into life at the jolliest time of it just to annoy them; the master himself generally deals with these gentlemen accordingly and usually wins respect or at any rate gets work out of them somehow. Now with a girl it is quite otherwise. She inclines to like her school, and she will follow her mistress and often give her much love and service. Then I have known jealousy on the mother's part spring up and create a disturbance like an evil whirlwind, and all pleasure is destroyed for both mistress and pupil. Jealousy and fighting will never win back a lost position. I admit it is sad to lose ground with our children's love, but remember it has to come, and it is a far wiser and a far sweeter course to smile with your children in all their joys than to jar and fret them because the natural law of things is taking them away from you, because in family life, as in other life in the

great world, "the old order changeth and giveth place to new." The very condition and position of Motherhood means sacrifice. It means an eternal state of service, and it is in this that mothers are often so beautiful and so beloved. There be those mothers of course who keep their children's devotion in the most extraordinary way, the extent of rope given seems only to make the children say how much better mother is than anyone else. But we cannot guarantee such a condition and I think that some of the wisest and some of the best do not get all they ought from their children, because they have not what the Irishman calls "the way wid them." Keeping pace with the children is sometimes pretty difficult, and to keep ahead of them very hard work, but the wisest course is to admit that they may get ahead of you in knowledge but you are ahead of them in experience, judgment, and self-control.

In taking up this line of thought, I don't advocate the spoiling of the children in the least. Motherhood is bound to take up the attitude of courage and honesty. It is as necessary to be straight with your children as it is to be straight in every relation of life. Here may I say one word about that line which some mothers in my day used to take, namely, of hiding things with regard to the children's faults from the father, lest he should be too severe. A father has every right to his views, and his rules ought not to be broken, and certainly mother should not wink at the evasions. It is a sad and improper condition of a household when it is divided as to action. Divided as to opinion is right enough if it agrees to differ, but what I think absolutely undignified and unworthy of Motherhood is to even in the smallest degree lessen the respect in which the children should hold their father, as the head of the household, who is the usual breadwinner.

Alas! sometimes he isn't a worthy head and he only is a waster. Then the nobility of Motherhood endeavours to cover it and repair it as best she may for her children. They, if they have any grit in them, will stand by her and help her, and it is not obvious to the world where the shoe pinches. (Courage is a great quality and it reigns in such small beings! such apparently gentle women's souls!) And if her children don't rise up and call her blessed, then indeed her lot is hard, and she can only think of and feel that satisfaction that

knows of "the consciousness of duty well done" which "makes music at midnight."

We cannot well separate the man's work and the woman's work, and the great beauty of it all lies in the idea that they rise or fall together Godlike, bond or free. Here the Motherhood of the unwedded woman comes in. She has the leisure to work for and to love and cherish the homeless and the wandering, and to her is not infrequently given the joy and satisfaction of dealing with these creatures successfully, whom their own kith and kin have failed to understand.

In the mother's work as the housekeeper there is a grave responsibility, for is not she thus the health-giver or preserver, the preventive of so much ill? As her household grows older and goes out to work, she really becomes the physician and healer of the heavy demands that strenuous, continuous work makes upon the physical and nervous system. Each individual's health and taste has to be considered in her housekeeping energies; and her temper and peacefulness, her order and method, have generally to do with that feeling of rest that brings the men folk back to the nest at eventide to gain repose and encouragement for the next day's struggle. No doubt two play at every game, and if the men are a bit tiresome it is the privilege of Motherhood to soothe the atmosphere, to amuse the weary one, and to let the man feel that home means love and peace.

It is not merely in home-life and its trivial round and common task that furnishes a scope for ideal Motherhood. Women who move in society have a great opportunity of exercising its beneficent charms. All over the world the worker, man, is tired with his day's contest, be it in commerce, in literature, in science, in art, in politics, in philanthropy. In whatever walk he may have been serving the state during the day, in the evening he is ready for some form of relaxation. Does he ever find it more pleasing than when it comes from the intercourse with a charming woman? And what is a charming woman, but one who unselfishly gives all her Motherhood's best instincts to please her neighbours at dinner, or into whatever form of amusement society has elected to call her for the moment? The attitude of Motherhood in society is one of frankness, of sympathy, of unselfish interest in others. And the whole world is ever glad to get hold of

the woman who understands the art of pleasing and being pleased, in fact she who grasps the essence of Motherhood is oil to all social machinery.

And now, having burdened you in fact, I feel I've nearly smothered you in "oughts" and advice and your responsibilities, I hope you will forgive me if I have taken nearly all your breath away. "Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and we must, by the light of hope, set forth to achieve the best we can. For our Motherhood and its cares we need some change and some holiday; we want to be kept young and we want to be kept fresh in spite of our ardent desire to do our duty by what I have heard called "dusthole interests." It is well to encourage a hobby; shall we say some taste should be cultivated that absorbs the mind for an hour or two each day outside the actual home work? A garden is a great comfort, or even a window garden will suffice to freshen the interests and give a feeling of recreation. A special line of reading or study may serve. Lectures, visiting a hospital, reading to someone who is ailing, making a collection of anything you fancy, sewing for some charity. It does not much matter for what, as long as it recuperates you to daily energy and daily zeal for all the toils and cares and responsibilities of Motherhood. Life is difficult enough, God knows, to the greater part of the world, and Motherhood and all it suggests should bring out in us all that care for others and that sympathy for others which will lead us to "lend a hand" in all the difficulties that crop up around us.

No man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself. We *are* our brothers' keepers, and the sense of Motherhood will cause us to give ourselves to all good works, and to spend and be spent for others.

The nobility of actual, real Motherhood seems to lie in her sense of service, and her duties are clearly pronounced and weighty, and cannot be shunted by any right-minded woman. The possibilities of Motherhood are in every woman, but here there is no hard and fast ruling, it must with her be optional. She is free to make her choice, and she seems less responsible to the onlooker, having no recognised tie, but to the individual woman herself there is a hand that beckons to her to bestow her gifts of Motherhood graciously in order that she, too, may know what it is to have lived and loved.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE P.N.E.U.*

BY MADAME REPPMAN, OF MOSCOW.

LAST spring, when I was going to England with the intention of studying the pedagogical societies of that country, I was asked by the members of the section of Home Education (of the Pedagogical Society) to open up, if possible, intercourse between our section and these societies.

I did all in my power to fulfil as well as I could your commission. To-day I will in a few words tell you the results of my journey; after that I will ask you to allow me to acquaint you with the Parents' National Educational Union, and to share with you the impressions I had of the Union.

The Parents' National Educational Union and the Froebel Society, the representatives of which I had the pleasure to know personally, received my proposals of intercourse with our section of Home Education with interest and cordiality. They look with earnestness on such a connection; the identicalness of interests existing between people working on the same ground must bring men of different nationalities nearer to each other, giving them, in the first place, the opportunity of understanding each other, and in the second, the possibility of acquiring knowledge from one another.

I read the programme of our section at the conversazione during the annual conference of the P.N.E.U. The conversazione is a very brilliant meeting of the Union. It takes place in the evening, and the foreign guests of the Union are asked to read and speak at the conversazione. After the reading of my paper, one of the members—Mr. Sadler—said the following kind words. (Here I translated Mr. Sadler's speech as it is in the *Parents' Review* for August, 1900. I also spoke of mentioning in your magazine the parts of our programme that could be useful to your own work.) At the end of the conference, by the help of some members of the Union, I had the opportunity of visiting some training colleges

* Paper read at the meeting of the Pedagogical Society (Home Education Section), at the University of Moscow, on November 29th, 1900.